

# **Guide to Horseback Riding on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest 2004**

## **Where Can I Ride My Horse on the National Forest?**

As a result of the new Land Management Plan, horseback riders can now ride on any designated open or closed road on the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forest (about 1,600 miles) or on any designated trail that is open to horseback use (about 200 miles on the national forests).

## **What is a Trail?**

The U.S. Forest Service has a designated system of trails stretching across the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forest. There are almost 900 miles of trails on the National Forest for a variety of uses. Some are appropriate for only one type of use such as mountain biking while some trails provide for a mixture of uses such as horseback riding and hiking. There are more than 200 miles of trails on the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forest open to horse use. Following is a listing of the trails open to horses along with the Ranger District that manages the trail.

Pinhoti	63 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
Beech Bottom	4 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
East Cowpen	7 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
Hemptop	5.4 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
Hickory Creek	8.6 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
Hickory Ridge	3.5 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
Horseshoe Bend	3.5 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
Iron Mountain	6.6 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
Penitentiary Branch	3.5 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
Rice Camp	3.9 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
Rough Ridge	7 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
South Fork	2.6 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
Sumac	9 Miles	Armuchee/Cohutta
Bull Mountain	18 Miles	Toccoa District
Turner Creek	4 Miles	Toccoa District
Pear Orchard Loop	2.5 Miles	Chattooga District
Frady Branch Loop	4.2 Miles	Chattooga District
Lady Slipper	6.2 Miles	Chattooga District
Latham Cemetary Loop	2.6 Miles	Chattooga District
Leatherwood Creek Loop	4.1 Miles	Chattooga District
Darnell Horse	8 Miles	Tallulah District
Willis Knob	17 Miles	Tallulah District
Falling Creek	5 Miles	Oconee District
Kinnard Creek	5 Miles	Oconee District
Ocmulgee	2.5 Miles	Oconee District
Wise Creek	4.5 Miles	Oconee District

## **Will More Trails Be Designated In the Future for Equestrians?**

The Forest Service is currently working through a trails analysis. This analysis will allow managers to see where the current system of trails is located by each type of recreation use. We will use this analysis to identify areas on the Chattahoochee or Oconee where there might be a need for additional trails based on current distribution, user needs, and environmental factors. Forest Service personnel are willing to work with horseback clubs or individuals to identify sites where there is a need for additional trail miles. Before a trail can be planned and built, however, the Forest Service must by law complete all appropriate surveys along with an analysis of potential effects of the trail on the natural resources in the area. After the analysis is complete, then we can begin the process of securing funding and planning construction for any new trail. This process will take 6 months to more than a year to complete.

## **What is a Road?**

The U.S. Forest Service has a system of roads that stretch across the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forest. These roads vary by level of development. Some are highly developed, wide, well-defined, heavily graveled and frequently used by vehicles. Some Forest Service roads are little more than lightly traveled woods roads. It is sometimes confusing to know which roads are 'designated' Forest Service roads.

One way to tell that a road is designated and on our system is by looking at a Forest map. Most developed roads are identified on the map with a Forest Service number. Another way to tell if a road is appropriate for horseback riding is to look for a number sign at the beginning of the road these signs generally are brown, rectangular and have the letters FS (for Forest Service) and a number following—such as FS602. An alternate method of finding out if a road is appropriate for horseback riding is to call and ask your closest Forest Service office. Forest Service personnel will be happy to tell you what is on the system and what is not.

There are many old skid trails that were used for logging on the National Forest or old abandoned roads that are not on the Forest Service road system. While these may seem like a perfect place to ride, they are not currently open for equestrians. In the future, some of these old paths might be considered for new trails, however surveys and analysis of environmental impacts are required before a proposed trail can be added to the current trail system.

## **When a Road is Closed During the Winter or Gated, Can I Still Ride My Horse on It?**

Yes. It is common for the U.S. Forest Service to close some roads in north Georgia during the winter months to prevent damage from motorized vehicles. These months bring more rainfall and combined with the freezing and thawing that we see in the north Georgia mountains, this can lead to severe damage when vehicles travel on these roads during those months. However, horseback riding will continue to be allowed on these seasonally closed roads or gated roads unless the road is signed specifically as closed to horse use or for foot travel only.